



# CITY OF HOUSTON

Planning & Development  
Department

**Bill White**

Mayor

Robert M. Litke  
Director  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, Texas 77251-1562  
611 Walker, 6th Floor  
Houston, Texas 77002

T. 713.837.7708  
F. 713.837.7703  
[www.cityofhouston.gov](http://www.cityofhouston.gov)

**TO:** Long Range Subcommittee

**FROM:** Robert M. Litke, Director

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**SUBJECT:** Long Range Planning Issue Paper

The following commentary is intended to help focus and facilitate discussion within the committee.

## **Growth Trends and Implications**

Steady growth in Houston since 1990 has been accompanied by significant changes in demography (race/ethnicity, household size, education, etc.). In broad terms, population and job growth is expected to continue in a wedge-shaped area extending westward from Downtown, but for much of the eastern part of the city, the western pull portends exacerbation of the 20-year decline.

## **Implications of Westward Growth**

While this growth is good and produces community wealth, it also brings an increased need for services and new infrastructure (with long term maintenance) and continues the sprawling development that demands extension of major transportation arteries. Given limitations on annexation, the expanding westward growth will soon leave city boundaries behind. If the bulk of new population is employed in the city, the service and maintenance burden will be upon the city taxpayers but the property tax and much of the sales tax revenues will lie elsewhere.

## **Implications of Low Growth in the Eastside.**

With new development and jobs concentrated to the west, for much of this area, stagnation and disinvestment will continue.

Private sector initiatives and public sector reaction have been the traditional Houston way; but the consequences of sprawl, neglect of infrastructure and increased poverty and abandonment in the inner city suggest a need for new policy direction to effectively address issues associated with change. The issues of change can be addressed through coordinated, collaborative, intergovernmental/interagency/private sector efforts within the framework of a long range plan as the tool for strategic management of change.

## **Annexation**

Historically, Houston, as other cities in Texas, has relied heavily on this annexation as a tool to maintain and expand the tax base and capture growth in the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction. On several occasions through the mid-60s Houston nearly doubled its size through major annexations. Since then, there have been two particularly notable annexations, the Clear Lake area (including nearly 20,000 residents) in 1978 and the Kingwood area (approximately 54,000 residents) in the late 1990s. After the controversial Kingwood annexation, the State legislature took steps to make the traditional, "full-purpose" annexation more difficult. A three-year notification requirement coupled with negotiation and the possibility of binding arbitration has made full purpose annexations almost non-existent. As a result, the city has been undertaking limited annexations of commercial properties through strategic partnership agreements with municipal utility districts. In these agreements, the city has been annexing commercial areas and applying its 1% sales tax, which is then shared 50-50 with the MUD. In most cases, the city does not provide municipal services and agrees not to undertake a full annexation for 30 years. While the city is adding to its tax base, there is nothing comprehensive about the approach to annexation.

## **A Comprehensive Plan for Houston**

In 1991, city council amended chapter 33 of the code of ordinances to require the planning commission to develop a comprehensive plan (intended to support a zoning plan). With defeat of the zoning referendum in 1994, the policy thrust of planning activities was away from comprehensive planning and much more towards planning at a neighborhood level.

A comprehensive plan would articulate a vision for the future and chart the course for guiding Houston into that future, addressing, in a unified, coordinated manner, the issues, challenges and opportunities resulting from growth. A typical plan would contain the following elements:

- **Vision:** Articulates the values of the community and the desired future direction..
- **Goals/Objectives:** A comprehensive set of policy statements affecting different aspects of city living and a set of priorities for action.
- **Implementation Strategy:** A set of actions intended to carry out the goals/objectives and priorities of the plan over a given period of time.

True to the Houston tradition, such a plan would not reflect control over land use but would reflect a set of community values that would influence public policy and investment decisions for the future. The framework and elements for a comprehensive plan as set forth in chapter 33 follows. A considerable body of work plan has been done over the past decade that can underlay the planning process, including: Imagine Houston (1994) and Blueprint Houston (2003), two major visioning efforts with extensive public participation and a host of regional, city and neighborhood-level plans.

(from section 33.52(3))

3). The elements of a comprehensive plan will include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- a. A draft statement of community goals for Houston's future.
- b. A detailed database including land use, population characteristics, employment information, local and regional economic growth trends, the needs for public facilities and services, and a program for

the maintenance of this database.

- c. A long-range planning process that continuously established a statement of needs, goals and planning alternative for the next 30 years, to be updated every five years and revised every 15 years.
- d. A statement of urban growth policies for the city including, but not limited to, policies related to transportation, the environment, growth patterns, safety, health, education, public utilities, finances and services, the preservation of historic resources and the improvement of deteriorated areas. The plan should consider growth over the next 30 years, and should include any possible alternative growth patterns that take into account such general concepts as land uses and transportation systems.
- e. A transportation plan and a land use plan in conjunction with State of Texas, County of Harris and the Metropolitan transit Authority that complements the goals statement the urban growth policies and other element of the comprehensive plan.
- f. An economic development policy, which should be designed to promote economic vitality and balanced growth for the city and region.
- g. A community facility policy, which should describe existing facilities (police, fire, emergency service, special service, library, health, facilities, etc.) and indicated the size and appropriate location of future facilities.
- h. Policies for utilities and infrastructure, which will describe existing facilities, program improvement and strategies for improvement to be provided commensurate with development. Infrastructure policies should address water, wastewater, stormwater, electric and gas utilities, flood facilities, solids waste, recycling, hazardous waste, communication and transportation facilities.
- i. An environmental analysis which should include a description of existing resource and policies.